

What has John seen? – week 16

A community centred on a new commandment

w/c 25 July 2021

"The church is to be the primary agent of mission and if it does not exhibit evident community and transformed lives then any amount of evangelistic events and church projects will have limited credibility." (Lesslie Newbigin)

Read John 13:31- 35 and 15:9-17

The "he" of v31 is of course Judas, sent on his way by Jesus with the words *"What you are about to do, do quickly."* The die has been cast; the disciples must be prepared for the time when Jesus will no longer be with them – at least not in the same way. So, what is the key thing they need to know? That they need to love one another.

The disciples would have been familiar with the Old Testament command to *"love your neighbour as yourself."* (Lev 19:18), so the question for us is what more did Jesus envisage for them here? The Greek word used for *new* by John here implies freshness rather than something different. It's no longer simply important; it's vital. This is not just a good thing for them to do; it is necessary for the survival of their community – the fundamental way to attract others.

We are not here being called simply to love each other; rather it is to follow the model of Jesus in loving us. Similarly, he will later tell his disciples that he is sending them as he was sent by the Father (John 20:21). The key question for us as a community is quite simply this: do others know that we are Jesus' disciples because of the love that they can see in and between us?

Breaking it down a little further:

- How do we – a set of disparate individuals and households – actually become an identifiable community?
- How do we show this community to the world around us?
- How do we make community for those currently outside the church?

In the section between our two passages, John records Jesus saying to the disciples (and by extension us) both that the Father will send *"another Counsellor"* and that he and the Father will come and *"make our home with them"*: essentially, two sides of the same promise (John 14:16&23). This reminds us of the inherent connectedness of the Trinity, forming the key exemplar to us of what community can be, for it is at the heart of the Godhead. The relationships within the Trinity have been described as *"actually making each who they are through living relation."*

Community is therefore central not just to the church but directly to God as well. In a world that is desperately seeking community, how do we make this real in our everyday lives and relationships?

If *who* we are matters far more than *what* we do, why is it perhaps that we tend to focus so much more on doing than on being?

"It is not just a dream of more and better individual Christians standing like isolated statues in a museum. It is a dream of a community vibrant with life, pulsating with forgiveness, loud with celebration, fruitful in mission..." (Brian McLaren)